



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

# **Is force ever justified in preventing a State from acquiring nuclear weapons?**

Dobra, Alexandra

The University of York, UK

February 2010

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/20847/>

MPRA Paper No. 20847, posted 21. February 2010 / 13:45

# **Is force ever justified in preventing a State from acquiring nuclear weapons?**

**Abstract.** In order to provide a grounded argument, the present paper asks the following questions. Why do States acquire nuclear weapons? Why do finally States tend to prevent this acquisition? What does the use of force imply? This logical structure adduces the argument sustaining the avoidance of the use of force as a viable preventive tool. It concentrates exclusively on States instituting a threat and on the force-led circumventive strategies' implications used by non-threatening States to prevent acquisition. Through first, stressing the security model it emphasise the security-stability reasons for which countries are willing to acquire the nuclear weapon. However, secondly it punctuates the tangible side effects faced by this model. Therefore, it highlights the move towards the vicious-circle logic. Owing this vicious-circle logic, prevention must be advocated. Nonetheless, the third part evidences, via the building of my inferential model (*confere* Figure 1, p.8), the fact that any prevention based on the use of force must be refrained on account of its consequences - it nourishes the vicious-circle logic.

**Keywords:** *Force, Nuclear weapons, Prevention, Acquisition, Security model, Vicious-circle logic, Pride, Inferential Model*

## Introduction

*“When you appeal to force, there's one thing you must never do - lose.”*

*Dwight Eisenhower*

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2006, in an official statement, the President of the United States of America, G. Bush stated that “all options are on table for preventing dangerous States from acquiring nuclear weapons”. Among these options, the use of smaller-yield nuclear weapons constituting an integral part of the USA airstrikes, developed by the Pentagon in early 2006, were included. Two corollaries follow. First, the need for a selective prevention implementation - only States representing a potential or effective threat for national or international security. Second, the need of these options to be essentially force-led - e.g.: military pre-emptive or preventive interventions.

Nuclear weapons are viewed by optimists (Waltz, 1981) as being profitable for the international arena, since they allow the enactment of an effective deterrence. Hence they sustain the adoption by new States. *A contrario*, pessimists (Sagan, 1996) consider nuclear weapons as presenting an unequalable threat, since actors are unable to master them effectively and due to the arising security-dilemma, and urge for the prevention of further acquisitions. Now, since the pessimistic view seems more plausible, or at least more reasonable, should the prevention involve the use of force? A part of the current literature focuses on the side effects of using force (Malin, 2010) and on the unethical dimension (Okin, 1983) of such a prevention.

However, the psychological and symbolic dimensions of the use of force are *quasi* derelicted in the current literature. This article argues that the use of force cannot be dissasociated from its symbolic and psychological impact on the subject - e.g.: *ubi maior, minor cesseat*. This argument is build on my inferential model (*confere* Figure 1, p.8) containing five variables - use of force, rogue and unstable States, head of State, pride constitutive of Human nature, pride constitutive of State. This construction helps to claim that the transmutation of one agent's principal psychological characteristics - pride sentiment - to the scale of an entire State - only possible for non-democratic States - highlights the reasons for which the use of violence in the prevention process must be avoided.

## **Why do States acquire nuclear weapons? (Or the security model as a support for the acquisition)**

*“Provide the bomb - it will remove a great danger from us.”*

*Joseph Stalin*

The security model sees the spread of nuclear weapons as constituting a stabilizer. The international anarchic system is replaced by a world nuclear authority having the capacity of deterring its adversaries. Since nuclear weapons are believed as having no war-winning ability, they are only fulfilling rational functions in deterrence, by providing its possessors with a “minimum deterrence” (Waltz, 1990). Nuclear deterrence is grounded in the mathematical game-theoretic models of rational interaction. Nuclear weapons transform concepts of deterrence and war fighting in military strategies. The perspective of the use of nuclear weapons constitutes a Sword of Damocles refraining actors from their aggressive actions, through the perspective of inflicting irremediable damages with a retaliatory nuclear contend. The logic of nuclear deterrence is based on the prospective of fear: it works because it is based on fear (Waltz, 1990). Even irrational leaders are likely to recognize the exceedingly high costs of a nuclear war hence, the “probability of major war among States having nuclear weapons approaches zero” (Waltz, 1990). Asal and Beandskey (2007) examined the relationship between the severities of violence in crises and the number of involved States with nuclear weapons. Their study is based on the ICB data set between 1918 and 2001, and shows that nuclear weapons decrease the level of violence in a crisis. Owing that “world politics occur in shadow of force” (Clausewitz, 1976), the prospect of military violence generates influence which often obviates the need to fight. The imminent risk of nuclear war tends to deter conventional forms of international violence, given the risk of escalation faced by nuclear powers. For instance, the Kargil conflict in 1999, nuclear deterrence delimited Indo-Pakistanis conflict. The security model is hence, grounded on semi-equilibrium of the balance of power, in which one actor adjusts its behaviour in response to the nuclear capability shock, while the other actor does not adjust.

The possession of nuclear weapons enhances the security - engaging in conflict with non-nuclear opponents without the fear that the opponent will challenge the fundamental interests - and the diplomatic power of the possessors. Possessors tend to emerge victorious from conflicts (e.g.: Second World War). Similarly, it influences allocation of resources and

bargains in favour of nuclear powers (Gartzke and Jo, 2007), as it is used strategically to garner international influence. Examining variables from the Issue Correlates of War Dataset, Gartzke and Jo found that States with nuclear weapons tend to resolve ongoing territorial, maritime and riparian issues more quickly, peacefully, and favourably. “To the extent that the military balance is stable at the level of all-out nuclear war, it will become less stable at lower levels of violence” (Geller, 1990). Nuclear weapons do not affect the frequency of conflict, but they do affect the timing, intensity and outcome of conflict. Nuclear weapons tend to shift intensity of disputes toward lower end of conflict scale.

However, the security model is too optimistic and ignores the psychological and informational aspects of proliferation. For instance, the relative nuclear stability between the US, NATO allies and Russia is due to the commonality of culture and historical experience. Furthermore, the security model also ignores the need of the country and of the global arena to attain a level of acclimatising with regard to the possession of nuclear weapons “whoever gets the nuclear weapon behaves with caution and moderation [...] over a period of more than fifty years” (Waltz, 1990).

### **Why do States tend to prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons? (Or the move from the security model to the vicious-circle logic)**

*“In order to protect us against a sword, we need a shield. Yet, the building of a shield for protecting us against nuclear weapons revealed itself to be impossible.”*

*Jacques Attali*

In 2007 Annual Report to Congress on the projected threats to the National Security of US, the Director of the National Intelligence, M. McConnell, concluded that nuclear proliferation poses one of the greatest threats to US national security. Does it signal an involuntary disconnection from the security model and a move towards the “proliferation begets proliferation” (Schultz, 1984) logic?

In *Atomic Power and World Order*, Brodie argued that there could be no defence against nuclear weapons and that States could guard against nuclear attack only if they had the ability to retaliate in kind. Such an argument clearly evidences the consequent security-dilemma and the vicious-circle logic of the acquisition. The stability-instability paradox

highlights that the possession of nuclear weapons by one State generates more local aggressions and small conflicts, contributing to the rise of a “spate of smaller wars” (Waltz, 1981). However, the probability of crisis initiation between two States will increase if both possess nuclear weapons (Sagan, 1996). The deriving strategies of brinkmanship - challenging altering status quo - emphasizes the fact that the risk of war is contingent on what is being demanded by both sides. For example, Asia and the Middle-East constitute geo-strategic parts composed by States with nuclear forces and on the way towards a nuclear acquisition programme - but having variable degrees of operational experience and in the propensity to achieve goals via the use of power. The spread of nuclear-capable delivery systems in these regions is especially dangerous because plausible adversaries live close together and are already engaged in territorial and religious disputes. Furthermore, the increasing nuclearization process of these regions, shifts geopolitics of mass destruction from European centre of gravity - controlled - to Asian and Middle Eastern centre of gravity - more inclined to lead to war outbreaks (Bracken, 1999).

Additionally, the respective episodes of the Cuban missile crisis 1961 and the Able Archer crisis of 1983 highlight that possessing nuclear weapons cannot refrain leaders from mistrust, misperceptions, miscalculations, because there is “little room for trust among States” (Clausewitz, 1967). During the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy announced publicly that the USA would regard any nuclear attacks from Cuba on the USA or elsewhere in Western hemisphere as the equivalent to a soviet attack on the USA, guaranteeing retaliatory response.

Intrinsic problems with command and control in nuclear war made deterrence highly risky, shifting towards the will to institute de-alerting strategies (Shell, 1998). “The common enemy of mankind was the bomb as widely-held weapon; the common interest of mankind and of the nations too, was to get that weapon under control” (Bundy, 1988). Inadvertent nuclear war is the result of unanticipated combination of human and technical factors, pulling inexorably both parties in a nuclear crisis despite shared interest in avoiding war. In inadvertent nuclear cases, the potential targeted State, must infer other side’s intention from the disposition of its forces, from the behaviour of its command, control and communications. In 1995, during the launch of Norwegian scientific rocket for the purpose of studying aurora borealis, the initial phase resembled to a ballistic missile possible headed for Russian territory. Without the intelligence offices’ efforts of Russia, this rocket launch could have generated a nuclear war. The effects of nuclear weapons are thus unpredictable and go beyond immediate space of application and concern: further insecurity, further proliferation etc...

## **What are the consequences of the use of force in the prevention process? (Or the use of force as a support of the vicious-circle logic)**

*“The direct use of force is such a poor solution to any problem - it is generally employed only by small children and large nations.”*

*David Friedman*

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report for the prevention of nuclear weapons acquisition stated that “If you're really worried that terrorists are going to get nuclear materials and build a bomb, then we have to be acting a lot more aggressively and thinking more comprehensively to lock down the global nuclear complex”. Accordingly, the use of force is arrogated because of the menace that some States constitute for the global security. States constituting potential threats are Rogue States and unstable nations. According to the American Pentagon, America's [and the world] security are less threatened by “conquering States than by failed and failing ones”. Among these categories, the principal targets are the countries suspected of developing a nuclear programme: North Korea, Iran, Syria, Morocco, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Despite this, on what grounds can a State or a community of States impose a prohibition on the basis of force? The use of force - having as classical form of expression the war - as a tool for prevention, can be legitimate only if it takes place within the concept of *jus ad bellum*. A war perpetrated for the just cause, falling under the category of an answer to “a wrong received” in Vitoria's terminology. Only an effectively implemented democratic regime can conduct a just war, since only legitimate governments have rights. Moreover, a just war must comply with requirements of the international legal infrastructure. Hence, any decision of use of force must be ratified by the United Nations' Security Council.

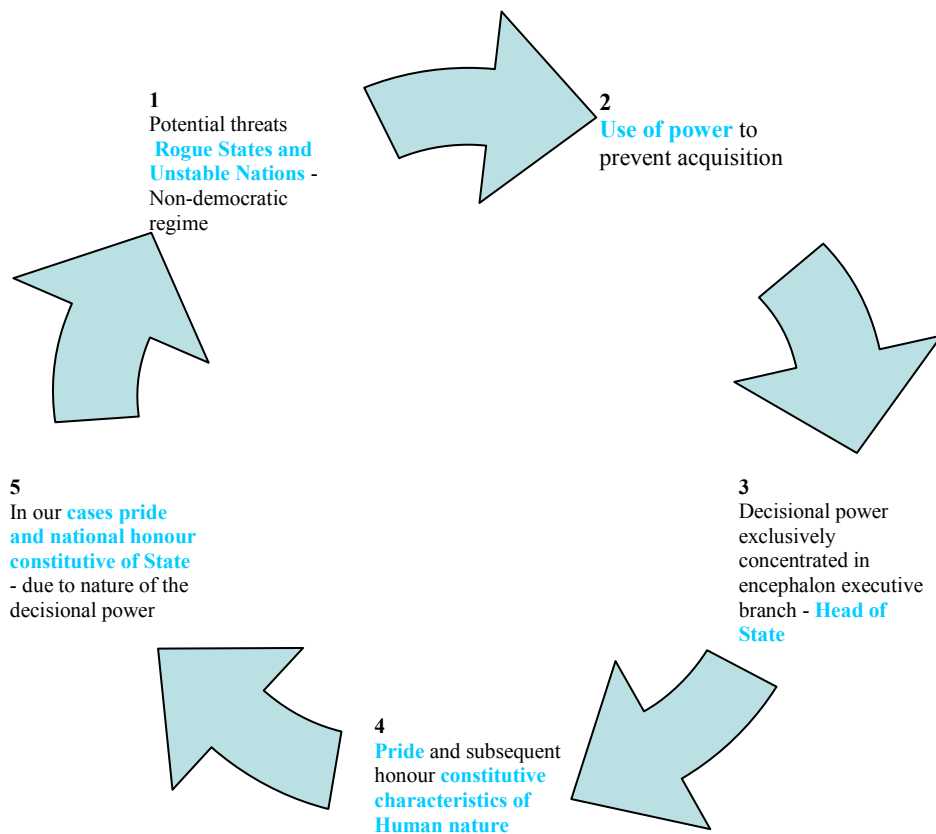
Ergo, among the tools involving force that a State has, pre-emptive and preventive wars - both are defensive strategies with offensive means – are incorporated. Pre-emptive wars are administrated within a time-urgent context: the opponent's attack is therefore imminent. As regards to preventive wars, they are launched to preclude growing power on future capability of an enemy who might plausibly attack. Therefore, the utility of pre-emptive war is based on the benefits of being the attacker instead of the defender, while the utility of preventive war is motivated by the desire to fight sooner than later. Most national security statements of the USA since 9/11 are characterized by the use of pre-emptive warfare. For instance, the Operation Iraqi Freedom was listed by the Bush administration as a

pre-emptive war (risk of Iraqi use of Mass Destruction Weapons). Withal, scholars have classified it as preventive.

The strategic rationality of the use of force is based on the Clausewitzian paradigm of war. It corresponds to a system of instrumental and utilitarian reason that considers force - even nuclear – as mean for the achievement of national political ends, bringing war itself under the control and restraint of the political sphere. This States a rationalistic assumption that well-planned and executed uses of force achieve a clear transmutations of military means into political ends by conquering the rival's will. However, this must be achieved at an acceptable cost beyond which the object must be given up. This strategic rationality comprehends a capital *bémol*. It identifies an instrumental reason that pairs the wrong *telos* and the wrong mean (military mean for rational policy end). The nuclear mean is too destructive while the end must be the global and human security. Furthermore, pre-emptive wars are provocative and the reaction of the enemy can never be entirely predicted due to the interference of contingencies and psychological attributes.

The use of force for achieving the prohibition is the *hic jacet lupus* for the global security. The inferential model that I developed (*confere* Figure 1, p.8) corresponds to the idea that because the potential States constituting a threat are non-democratic, their respective powers are concentrated within the hands of their head of State. Pride and subsequently honour are inherent and constitutive psychological characteristics of the Human being. In our present case, due to the concentrated and centralized power, States are assimilable to their head. Therefore, using force in order to prevent their acquisition of nuclear weapons, leads to the reversed effects of those anticipated. Passions are studied in their connection to the motivation which can lead to positive or negative effects. The emotive origin in conjunction to the circumstances determines behaviours and actions. In our case the emotive shutter release is identified as the State's hammered pride, "in general, pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes" (Ruskin, 2000).





*The inferential model (Figure 1)*

The act of hindering a State the possibility of acquiring nuclear weapons, via the use of force due to its symbolism (e.g.: cardinal value) prejudices its pride and its subsequent honour. It corresponds to treat this State as a child, an entity cognitively and morally underdeveloped. This implies the absence of effective and formalized recognition of the State's legitimacy in the international sphere. Paradoxically, this hindering also marks the recognition of the force and of the potential danger that this State represents if supplied with nuclear weapons. Indeed, the use of force involves either the idea of the failure or the absence of other means, and thus corresponds to a last resort tool. This specificity empowers the enemy since it inducts in its mind the idea of its importance. This relation of negation-affirmation conducts towards the enforcement of the State's desire to acquire the nuclear weapon. For instance, if the United States would decide to bombard Iran's nuclear sites, the Islamic regime, in a crisis of legitimacy, would transform this situation in a positive one by highlighting the hammered pride and would nourish an incentive nationalistic strategy leading

to the acquisition. The forced interference marks the symbolism of an authoritarian paternalism grounded in a moral and developmental superiority. Besides, it also signals the hegemony of the civilized Western and of the *world culture*, of the *alpha* States. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle highlights that Human beings try to give the evil via the evil otherwise they consider themselves as being reduced to the grade of slaves. Because both pride and honour of an agent assert publicly the capacity to defend and to control, when these are hammered, the agent seeks revenge. Thus, revenge which is the consequence of a hammered pride and of a subordinated national honour is the direct reaction to a noxious action. In *Essays Civil and Moral; and, the New Atlantis*, Bacon calls the passion of revenge the wild justice and insists on its antisocial and destructive character. By using an identical argumentative structure, it results that any action involving the use of force in order to compel, does also present the above mentioned consequences.

In our case, the first category of States among which force would be used in order to prevent the nuclear weapon's acquisition are rogue States, vilipended because of their constant use of force. This force response to a force message is entering into the vicious-circle logic. To use Schultz's syntactical structure, it can be said that "violence begets violence". For example, when you attack a Rottweiler there is no place for uncertainty with regard to its response to your aggression, this situation is paralleled at the level of States. Congruently, in February 2010, current President of Iran, M. Ahmadinejad warned the Great powers, that they will regret if they decide to adopt sanctions. If this is valid for formal sanctions, it would be even more valid for force-involving sanctions. Furthermore, "wars have unexpected consequences for the winners, by making them prisoners of unsuspected political troubles (e.g.: intervention in Iraq)" (Layne, 1991). The first USA war in Iraq, in 1991, was a conventional attack on a defender nuclear capable (Iraq was fought so). This attack led to the emergence of Iran as the regional power and subjected Iraq to centrifugal forces, having favoured the civil war and having laid the grounds for the next US military intervention (in 2003). The second category comprises States that are unstable and labile. Here, the pre-emptive or preventive intervention is either vain or involves side-effects. Even if the intervention succeeds militarily, it will have no effect on the political regime of the targeted nation. Force interventions are not acting upon the structure, upon the cause. Furthermore, using force against a labile State, will lead to further instability and consequent uncertainty about its future actions.

Moreover, the use of force creates a unity among the enemy's societal forces and creates the empathy and sympathy of the neighbourhood or of the States' allies. The war in

Vietnam enabled the “Vietcong to acquire additional recruits and weapons” (Morgenthau, 1965). Particularly Asia and Middle-East (regions considered as potential threats) are characterized by having *we-self* cultures. This implicates that once the pride and honour assailed, a social unity will occur, generating an infra-State or even inter-State will to defeat the enemy’s ends (here the prevention). As an illustration, the strategic alliance Iran-Syria can be mentioned. With a high degree of probability, if one of these countries would be impeded by force from acquiring nuclear weapons, it would release a “fraternal” answer from its allied. Owing all these consequences, derived from the inferential model, the use of force in order to achieve the prevention must be avoided, since the risk is too high. “To love means to renounce to the use of force” (Kundera, 1989), persistently, to respect other States and the Human kind [via assessing the consequences of force-led preventions] means to renounce to the use of force.

## Conclusion

This article has constructed an argument for why force should be avoided as a prohibition toll against the acquisition process. It should be avoided on the account that it entertains the vicious-circle logic because of its conjunction to the subject’s pride and honour and the marking of a developmental superiority. Therefore, a viable solution with regard to the prevention would be the implementation of a horizontal strategy. The aim would be to palliate to, and to abolish the symbolic of the *Western superiority*, since it is necessary to exit the *good States, bad States* dialectic. Moreover, such a preventive model necessitates a real platform of dialogue between the parties and calls for a mutual re-definition of identities.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotle, (2006). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Asal, V. and Beardsley, K. (2007). Proliferation and international crisis behaviour. *Journal of Peace Research*, 44 (2), 139-155.
- Attali, J. (1995). *Economie de l’apocalypse*. Paris : Le Livre de Poche.

- Bacon, F. (1909). *Essays Civil and Moral; and, the New Atlantis*. New-York: P.F. Collier.
- Bracken, P. (1999). *Fire in the east: the rise of asian military power and the second nuclear age*. New-York: Harper Collins.
- Brodie, B. (1972). *The absolute weapon: atomic power and world order*. New-York: Freeport.
- Bundy, M. (1988). *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*. New-York: Random House.
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at [www.ceip.org/strategy](http://www.ceip.org/strategy) [Accessed 16 February 2010].
- Clausewitz, C. (1976). *On war*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.
- Geller, D. (1990). Nuclear weapons, deterrence, and crisis escalation. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 34 (2), 291-310.
- Gartzke, E. and Jo, D. (2007). Determinants of nuclear weapons proliferation. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51 (1), 167-194.
- Layne, C. (1991). Why the gulf war was not in the national interest. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 268 (1).
- Malin, M. (2010). *Coercive arms control*. New-York: Routledge.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2001). *The tragedy of the great power politics*. New-York: Norton.
- Morgenthau, H. (1965). *Vietnam and the United States*. Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press.
- Kundera, M. (1989). *L'insoutenable légèreté de l'être*. Paris : Folio.
- Okin, S., M. (1983). The moral acceptability of nuclear deterrence: a critique. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 18 (2), 16-26.
- Ruskin, J. (2000). *Modern painters III*. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation.
- Sagan, C. (1995). *The Demon-Haunted World*. New-York: Random House.
- Schultz, G. (1984). *Preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons*. Washington D.C.: US Department of State Bulletin.
- Schell, J. (1998). *The gift of time: the case for abolishing nuclear weapons now*. New-York: Henry Holt&Company
- Waltz, K. (1981). The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better, *Adelphi Papers*, 171.
- Waltz, K. (1990). Realist thought and neorealist theory. *Journal of International Affairs*, 44 (1), 21-37.